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Living on the Edge: Georgian Foreign Policy Between the West and the Rest¹

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Introduction

“Small states”, according to an oft-quoted volume, “enjoy more international prestige and visibility than at any other time in history”.¹ At the same time foreign policy action space and strategic opportunities of small states vary more widely than at any time since the beginning of the modern states system. In contrast to nineteenth century Europe when the great powers met in concert to decide on the rules of the game,² today “the international legal system legitimizes political units without regard to size”,³ but at the same time same time formal equality has been accompanied by a widening gap between what individual small states can and cannot do.

This paper explores the strategic consequences of this gap. I argue that the strategic options of small states are dependent upon how much action space they are allowed by other states, in particular the great powers, in their close vicinity. To be sure, this is a classic insight of small state studies.⁴ However, as I will show in the following sections, it needs to be rediscovered as well as revised if we are to understand how and why the strategic opportunities and challenges of small states vary in the present world order. Using Georgia as an example, I argue that the strategic options of a small state in the contemporary world order depends upon whether it conducts its foreign policy in

¹ A previous version of this paper benefitted from comments at the BISA @ 40 workshop ‘Non-Western Small States: What Agency in an Unequal World?’ at the Annual Conference of the British International Studies Association, London, June 16, 2015, and from a presentation at a research seminar at the University of Zagreb, November 16, 2015. In particular, I would like to thank Stefano Musco, Virginie Grzelczyk, Marie Gibert and two anonymous reviewers for comments on earlier drafts.

the shadow of postcolonial, modern or postmodern states. I discuss how this affects the strategic menu as well as the foreign policy dilemmas of small states. Georgia is seen as a ‘laboratory’ for exploring these issues as it is located between the post-modern EU to the West, the modern Russia to the North and the postcolonial Middle East and former Soviet Central Asian states to the South and the East. In addition, Georgia may be viewed as a state with postmodern, modern and postcolonial characteristics.

The argument is organized into four main sections and a conclusion. The first section provides a brief overview of the scholarly debate on small states in international relations arguing that despite important advancements in our understanding of small states, there is a need for improving our understanding of how and why the conditions for small state strategy vary across the international system. The second section suggests one answer to this challenge by exploring the similarities and differences between modern, postmodern and postcolonial states and discussing the implications for small state strategy. The third section applies this framework to Georgian foreign policy. The fourth section discusses the limitations of the analytical approach of the paper and how these limitations may be amended by a stronger engagement with balance of threat theory before the paper is concluded.

The security predicament of small states: from survival problem to influence problem?

The study of small states in international relations traditionally focused on a fundamental puzzle: How and why do these states survive considering their limited capabilities and the anarchic structure of the international system leaving them, internationally, without a legitimate monopoly of violence for protection?⁵ Thus, the security predicament of small states has traditionally been viewed as a logical consequence of their limited capabilities and the vulnerabilities that follow. By definition they suffer from a ‘capability deficit’. Small states are typically defined by absolute (e.g. a threshold population of 5 million) or relative (e.g. ‘non-great powers’ scoring less than the most powerful states across a range of capabilities) criteria focusing on their (lack of) material capabilities. The capability deficit “has been viewed as a handicap to state action, and even state survival”,⁶ because their relative lack of power has given small states less influence over international events and a smaller margin of time and error and as a consequence left them concerned primarily with risks of military attack and economic vulnerability,⁷ and strategies aiming defensively at survival.⁸

This view of the small state subscribes – implicitly more often than explicitly – to a neorealist understanding of world politics, where states are regarded as ‘like units’ primarily aiming for survival and with variations in their ability to ensure survival reflecting primarily differences among them in material capabilities.⁹ Theoretically, this has led to the expectation that a combination of the anarchic structure of international system and the behavior of systemic great powers are the main drivers of small state foreign policy.¹⁰ As noted by Hey, “if there is one piece of conventional wisdom about how best to explain small state behavior, it is that the answer lies at the system level of analysis. That is, because of their relatively weak power base within the international system, small states will act in passive and reactive modes, rather than as proactive agents of international change.”¹¹ To be sure, this literature makes an important contribution to our understanding of small states by pointing out that inequality in capabilities creates inequality in opportunities for survival and influence internationally. However, beyond this fundamental point it has little to tell us about the strategic opportunities and challenges available to small states. In particular, it suffers from two weaknesses. First, it overemphasizes the importance of conventional military threats to the territorial survival of many small states. Inside the Euro-Atlantic area most small states do not face a conventional threat to their territorial survival as they benefit from the protection from the world’s strongest military power, the United States, as well as the United Kingdom, France and Germany and membership of NATO and the EU. Outside the Euro-Atlantic area many small states face more dangerous threats from unconventional threats including insurgents or potential breakaway republics within their territory. Second, the focus on the system level means that this literature tends to overlook the importance of location and distance for small states. This is odd, because it is exactly the limited capabilities of small states, which lead them to focus on their close geopolitical vicinity as their chance of projecting power beyond that has traditionally been limited. In practice it has been developments in the geopolitical vicinity of the small state and the great powers situated nearby, which have most often put small state survival at risk.¹² The system level approach is essentially a great power view of small states extrapolating the challenges and opportunities of great powers to the study of small states. For this reason it does not provide the tools us to detect and explain variations in strategic options among small states. As a consequence, the traditional system level approach leaves us with the puzzle it was seeking to explain: why and how do small states survive?

This neorealist view of the small state in international relations is contrasted by a more recent perspective. Whereas the traditional approach focused on the challenges and limitations of being a small state, this approach focuses on the opportunities. Growing out of analyses of foreign

policy and cooperation and integration in Europe, this literature is less concerned with size defined by capabilities and more concerned with “perceptual size (how domestic and external actors regard the state)” or even “preference size (ambitions and prioritizations of the governing elite and its ideas about the international system)”.¹³ Whereas the traditional view of the small state in international affairs is based on an understanding of world politics consistent with neorealism, this view is closer to a constructivist understanding. Thus, it tends to emphasize how small states may influence or even alter the discursive structures of the European or global political space by acting as norm-entrepreneurs setting a normative agenda and providing benchmarks within selected issue areas.¹⁴ It also argues that what we understand as ‘security’, foreign policy’ or ‘national interest’ may be more fluid than acknowledged in the traditional literature and therefore more moldable.¹⁵ Thus, small states survival and influence are not easily defined in a general and essentialist way, but in themselves the subject of negotiation.

This literature has advanced our understanding of the strategic opportunities of small states by pointing to the importance of ideational constructs in international relations and diplomacy and how the lack of material capabilities may be balanced by norm-entrepreneurship thereby expanding the strategic opportunities of small states. Sometimes international relations is more like buffet than a set menu, even for small states. However, this approach suffers from two shortcomings. First, it tends to overemphasize the opportunities for small-state agenda setting, i.e. the equality between great powers and small states. This partly follows from the single or limited number case study methodology of many of the contributions to this body of literature and the ambition to challenge the conventional realist understanding of small states acting at the mercy of great powers. Thus, proving conventional wisdom wrong the literature does a good job showing when and how small states make a difference in world politics, but at the same time it suffers from a selection bias in its focus on the success stories of mainly North European states influencing issue areas that most often fall within the ‘low politics’ category. From this follows a second limitation: this literature tends to play down or even ignore the inequality among small states. By focusing overwhelmingly on small states in the Euro-Atlantic area, the obvious blind spot of the literature is the majority of states outside this area. This is unfortunate, because the resilience and vulnerability of small states vary widely as a consequence of their domestic political and economic differences and variations in geopolitical location and institutional membership.¹⁶

In sum, these two contrasting perspectives provide us with valuable insights on the conditions for small state strategy but they also leave us with rather blunt instruments if we are to

explore the variations in strategic opportunities and challenges among small states and explain their individual strategic choices. They are not wrong, but they are underspecified. Thus, what we need is a systematization of sources of variation for strategic opportunities allowing us to specify the scope conditions for small state strategic choice.

Variations in statehood and great power politics

Sørensen's ideal type categorization on the typical forms of statehood provides one such systematization.¹⁷ Sørensen identifies three ideal types of states – modern, postmodern and postcolonial - sharing four fundamental characteristics: a defined territory, an identifiable population, some form of government and constitutional independence.¹⁸ The four shared characteristics are what make these entities states.

Beyond these characteristics, Sørensen identifies three ideal types. The *modern* state first emerged in Europe as it gradually overtook imperial types of organization as the main type of political entity in the region and from the twentieth century gradually spread to other parts of the world. This type of state is characterized by a legitimate monopoly on the legitimate use of force and a centralized system of rule including administrative, military and policing organization for upholding domestic order based on variations on the rule of law. It is characterized by a high level of community and cohesion and a strong correspondence between state and nation. Economically, the main sectors needed for reproduction and major parts of the economy are embedded in domestic society. The *postcolonial* state emerged as the European colonial empires were dissolved in the twentieth century. Domestic order is based on coercion rather than the rule of law as no legitimate monopoly of violence has been established and the institutional structures of the state are weak. There is a low sense of community inhibiting the development of democratic norms and institutions and economically it is typically dependent on the world market with strong dependence on a few export commodities and semi-feudal structures in agriculture. The *postmodern* state is mainly the product of intensified state cooperation in Europe after the Second World War induced by a combination of increased (uneven) globalization, comparatively weak European states in the Cold War superpower conflict, and political and economic pressure from the United States for cooperation among the region's liberal democratic states. In postmodern states the domestic order is not as easily distinguished from the international order as in modern and postmodern states. Political and administrative governance is multilevel

spanning supranational, national and international institutions in various combinations, and this is also reflected in community and citizenship rights extending both above and below the national level and in the economy, which is to a large extent embedded in cross-border networks.

These differences between different types of statehood are reflected in foreign policy. For the modern state traditional inter-state relations take primacy. Sovereignty is fixed and non-negotiable, and the modern power is able to provide the basic political, administrative and economic infrastructure to uphold a viable domestic order and to protect this order from outside enemies by its national defence. Accordingly, the modern state deals in spheres of interest and reciprocity in interstate relations, and its main challenges and opportunities in international relations are the results of a struggle for power and security among states striving to maximize their interests in international anarchy – with military means if necessary.

To the postmodern state, globalization - rather than an international anarchy populated by sovereign states – provides the starting point for its foreign policy.¹⁹ Globalization understood as “a process that encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of transnational and transcultural integration of human and non-human activities” and therefore entailing increased political, economic and security interdependence and interconnectedness causing states to lose control over some domains at the same time as they gain control over others has two important consequences for foreign policy.²⁰ First, the “playing field of politics” is transformed from a process primarily taking place within states to “a complex congeries of multilevel games played on multilayered institutional playing fields, above and across, as well as within, state boundaries. These games are played out by state actors, as well as market actors and cultural actors”.²¹ Second, as a consequence, territorial disputes are viewed as a nuisance to be avoided rather than a way to increase influence and power. Territorial gain is of little use to the postmodern state. In contrast it is likely to induce costs related to political unrest, migration and potential sanctions from the international society.

The postcolonial state’s worldview exhibits some of the same characteristics as both the modern and the postmodern state. Like the modern state, it views international relations in terms of a power struggle among autonomous actors in an anarchic world, but like the postmodern state it does not view politics as tied to a territorial state holding a legitimate monopoly of violence. Rather a complex power struggle between many different kinds of actors is taking place inside and outside the state. The political elites of the postcolonial state are deeply dependent on the norms of international society for their survival, most importantly international recognition of sovereignty based on existing

borders. This recognition protects from external threats by entailing the principle of non-intervention and from domestic threats by constraining international support to the territorial claims of autonomy.²² It is as deeply embedded in and dependent upon the forces of globalization as the postmodern state, but whereas the postmodern state navigates between protecting autonomy and maximizing influence, the postcolonial state is mostly in the receiving end of globalization processes and seeks mainly to protect territorial integrity and survival by norms of sovereignty and preferential treatment.

The strategies of small states are likely to fare dramatically different depending on whether the states they are dealing with are modern, postmodern or postcolonial. At the same time the ability of the small state to develop and implement strategies will also vary with its own type of statehood. As modern, postmodern and postcolonial types of statehood are ideal types, the process is further complicated as most states will exhibit characteristics of more than one type of statehood. The next section explores this problematique by discussing the extreme case of Georgia: a state located between modern, postmodern and postcolonial actors and at the same time sharing characteristics with all three types of statehood.

Georgia between modern, postmodern and postcolonial worlds

“Since ancient times the Caucasus areas has been a frontier and link between Europe and Asia, where cultures, empires and religions have met, fought or cooperated”, writes former European Parliament ‘rapporteur’ Per Gahrton in his vivid account of Georgian politics and foreign relations.²³ This is an even more accurate description of Georgia than of the rest of the Caucasus as Georgia views itself as Europe’s gateway to Asia and Asia’s gateway to Europe. Even more important, as noted above, Georgia is located between predominantly modern Russia, predominantly postmodern Europe and predominantly postcolonial Middle East and Central Asia.²⁴

Although occasionally characterized as the “postmodern face of Caucasus”,²⁵ Georgia is more accurately described as a state combining the ideal type characteristics of the three types of statehood. The collapse of the Soviet Union left Georgia with some of the characteristics of a postcolonial state. Georgia bordered on collapse, and suspicion and insecurity came to dominate relations between Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia resulting in “the emergence of a triangular struggle: Georgia fighting the Soviet Union for its national liberation; Moscow fighting the Georgian

drive for secession, leaders of autonomous Abkhazia and South Ossetia trying to defend their political rights against Georgian nationalism”.²⁶ As a result Georgia became “the most contested state of the post-Soviet Southern Caucasus”.²⁷ Also, as in many other postcolonial states, independence was the result of a nationalist uprising concentrating power in the hands of the president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia.²⁸ Gamsakhurdia was ousted in a coup in 1992, and replaced by former Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Shevardnadze. However, Gamsakhurdia’s supporters continued to present a threat to the survival of Shevardnadze’s political regime leading him engage in a delicate act of ‘omnibalancing’ that came to characterize his presidency.²⁹ First, by asking for the support of Russian troops to counter the continuing threat of Gamsakhurdia’s armed supporters and their strongholds in Western Georgia in exchange for Georgian membership of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which Shevardnadze had initially been against, and later by engaging in a soft authoritarian “‘balancing of interests’, where former members of the Soviet elite were balanced against a faction of young reform-oriented liberals”³⁰ with the effect of precluding the development of legitimate and effective political and administrative institutions. The elite driven pro-Western Rose Revolution ousting Shevardnadze in 2003 was at the same time a result of the rise of a pro-liberal NGO-rich civil society and a motor for the continued strengthening of this civil society in the first years after the revolution. At the same time corruption was reduced and the public sector made more efficient, and national defence strengthened through training programmes and economic support from the United States. Thus, the Georgian state began to exhibit the characteristics of modern statehood, although with the important qualification of a disputed territory. From the late 1980s, even before Georgia’s declaration of independence from the Soviet Union, Abkhazia and South Ossetia demanded independence and since late 1990, Tblisi has had little authority over the two republics.³¹ It is Georgia’s approach to the eventual solution of its territorial disputes over these two republics after the 2008 war – focusing on diplomatic and institutional solutions rather than a continuing military conflict - which has earned it the characterization as a postmodern state. However, the Georgian ambition to reintegrate the two republics into Georgia proper illustrates that Georgia continues to be closer to the modern ideal type, although in some respects a ‘would-be postmodern’.

Facing the modern great power: Hiding or seeking shelter from Russia?

Traditionally, the most fundamental problem of small states has been how to survive in the face of the overwhelming power and interests of nearby great powers. This is a problematique tied closely to

the modern great power dominating a sphere of interest in its geopolitical vicinity and using small states within this area as buffers against competing great powers. This leaves small states with two fundamental strategic options: ‘opt out’ of international relations by pursuing so-called hiding strategies of economic self-sufficiency and military neutrality and thereby reducing vulnerability, *or* seek protection from international relations by military and/or economic protection from one of the great powers by pursuing so-called shelter strategies of bilateral and multilateral alliances.³² Shelter strategies may take the form of either adapting to the policies of the threatening great power, i.e. bandwagoning, or by joining an opposing alliance, i.e. balancing.³³

For post-Soviet Georgia hiding was never a realistic option. The two pro-Russian breakaway republics South Ossetia and Abkhazia effectively excluded any attempts at hiding unless Georgia had been willing to give up territorial claims over the republics. Russia has continued to back the two breakaway republics financially and militarily. It did so in the two republics’ 2008 war with Georgia,³⁴ and recently it tightened relations in the first months of 2015 by signing strategic alliances with both republics. Furthermore, Russia continues as the primary market for Georgian agricultural exports and the primary work destination for Georgian expats.³⁵ In addition, by positioning itself politically as a ‘beacon of liberty’ spearheading not only US foreign policy interests but also serving as a model for the spread of liberal democracy and Western values and seeking to portray itself as a credible candidate for NATO membership,³⁶ Georgia effectively ruled out any chance of hiding from the Russian great power even before the 2008 war.

Shelter from the United States was at the same time a precondition for this foreign policy and an aspiration of the Georgian leadership. On the one hand, Georgia needed the financial and military backing of the United States in order to balance the threat from Russia. On US initiative, Georgia joined the Partnership for Peace programme in 1994 and was named a NATO ‘aspirant country’ in 2011. The US created the Train and Equipment Program in 2002 to “assist in the implementation of western standards in the Georgian armed forces”,³⁷ and Georgian defence was significantly upgraded from 2004 to 2008. US assistance was vital for the procurement of e.g. battle tanks, drones, artillery and helicopters as well as training, aimed specifically to bring Georgian military capabilities up to par with NATO standards. On the other hand, the shelter strategy has, at least in the short to medium term, been without real effect on Georgian territorial defence at best, and counterproductive at worst.³⁸ Georgia has no date set for NATO membership and is unlikely to get one until its territorial disputes with Russia are resolved. Unfortunately for Georgia, there is little prospect of ending these disputes as long as the result of a successful negotiation will be Georgian

NATO membership, thereby moving NATO firmly into the Russian sphere of interest in the post-Soviet space and thereby challenging the modern great power's sphere of interest.

A shelter from the United States, however, is not the only option. Finding it impossible to 'hide' from Russia, because of the territorial disputes over Abkhazia and South Ossetia and being denied an effective shelter by NATO, we should not be surprised that Russian interests have come to play a larger and more active role in Georgian society, including the Georgian political establishment since the 2008 war. A number of pro-liberal democracy Open Society foundations funded by George Soros was a significant source of financial support for reform-oriented liberals in the lead-up to the revolution and several senior government figures were recruited from Soros-financed NGOs, but only a few years after the revolution, in 2005, this resulted in an anti-Soros movement in Georgia protesting the Soros backed 'Western' influence on Georgian society. Despite continuing Russian occupation of 20 percent of Georgian territory, approximately a fifth of Georgians support membership of the Eurasian Union, a Russian-led alternative to the EU, and the share of voters finding that Georgia would benefit from abandoning Euro-Atlantic integration in favour of better relations with Russia rose from 20 percent in April 2014 to 27 percent in March 2016.³⁹ Still, perceptions of Russian influence over Georgian society are still strongly negative. In a recent poll conducted by the US based National Democratic Institute, 80 percent of respondents agreed that Russia has a lot or some influence over Georgia and of those 76 percent found this to be negative, whereas only 12 percent saw it as positive.⁴⁰ Despite this finding, Eurasianist groups are now more prominent in Georgian political life than they have been for a decade.⁴¹ Also, the 'Georgian Dream' coalition winning the parliamentary election in 2012 and the presidential election in 2013, while continuing to aim for Georgian membership of Euro-Atlantic institutions, has attempted normalization with Russia.⁴²

Small states choosing to support or follow a modern great power should be willing to engage in "a transactional social exchange in which they give and receive benefits".⁴³ However, as the Georgian case illustrates, the market value of these benefits are likely to vary with great power interests. Since the 2008-war Georgia has gained 'market value' for Russia as a successful example of the modern great power exercising what its leadership perceives to be its rights in the post-Soviet near-abroad. At the same time it has lost 'market value' for the United States as "Western quiescence in the face of Russian territorial aggression" is as much a result of a change in US foreign policy as it is a consequence of Russian policies.⁴⁴ With a more narrow emphasis on the pragmatic advancement of US interests and less emphasis on the spread of democracy than during the

neoconservative Bush era, Georgia has less to offer as a ‘beacon of liberty’ for the United States and more value as a poster boy for Russian near abroad policies than before.

Failing to bind the postmodern great power: Georgia as a (non-)European state

The Georgian leadership views EU membership as complementary with its bid for NATO membership and in 2014 Georgia signed an Association Agreement with the EU, but the 2015 Riga summit “proved a major disappointment to partner countries Georgia and Moldova, as EU actions fell short of previous promises and still more so of the partners’ expectations.”⁴⁵ Thus, we should not be surprised that the EU has played a less prominent role than the United States in Georgian security, and no member state has taken on a role of ‘sponsor’ akin to the one played by the United States in NATO. In the aftermath of the 2008 war, the EU negotiated a peace agreement between Russia and Georgia, but rather than reflecting the postmodern nature of the EU or the interests of Georgia, its content seemed largely to accommodate Russian interests and offered no guarantees on when and how Russian troops would leave the Georgian territory leaving the EU’s effect on conflict settlement as “minimal at best”.⁴⁶ The Georgian government, views their country as a bridge from West to East, an indisputably European county providing expert knowledge of how to manage relations with the Caucasus, the Middle East and beyond but itself belonging with the rest of Europe inside NATO and the EU. However, to EU decision-makers the ambiguity of Georgia’s status as ‘European’ and its unresolved internal security issues “forces upon European decision-makers a discussion about how far to the East the Union may be expanded, and how to balance between Europe’s ideals about international society and its interests in cordial relations with Russia”.⁴⁷

The European Union is the political entity closest to an ideal type postmodern power in contemporary international relations. A postmodern great power rarely presents a conventional military threat. The complex political playing field of a globalized political space creates a fluid political environment, which necessitates means that goes beyond the traditional tools of statecraft, and it will most often attempt to “transform the interests, priorities, and expectations of its would be followers, and convince them to join the pursuit of ‘higher’ moral goals articulated by the leader”.⁴⁸ This represents less of a clear and present danger to small states than the modern great power’s threat of subjugation or invasion, but at the same time risks undermining the long term autonomy of the state. It is counterproductive (and becoming close to impossible) to hide from postmodern Europe,

and while sheltering might protect against outside enemies and threats, asymmetries within the shelter could create new ones. The typical small state strategy to offset these asymmetries is binding, attempting to ‘tame’ or at least to de-militarize power politics by binding the great powers through international treaties and institutions, even though they have fewer resources to do so than their great power counterparts.⁴⁹ Not only are their official delegations typically smaller than those of the larger states, in addition they suffer from fewer lobbyists from domestic society and more limited access to technical and administrative expertise. Moreover, their small markets and limited military capabilities typically leave small states dependent upon successful international cooperation, and therefore facing a double asymmetry: they need a successful outcome of negotiations more than the great powers, but they are less able to influence the result of the negotiations than the great powers.

Despite these challenges, small states within the European Union have achieved some success in binding the great powers in economic and non-military security affairs by working within the ‘European project’ defined by the great powers and contributing to European growth and order.⁵⁰ However, for small states in the margin of Europe, such as Georgia, binding is much more difficult. By way of enlargement, Georgia has become the EU’s geopolitical vicinity. The enlargement with Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 extended EU territory to the Black Sea intensifying EU engagement in the post-Soviet area, which had already been a result of Baltic EU membership and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) since 2004 stressing the “transformative power” of the EU through market access rather than military power.⁵¹ The postmodern great power’s view of territorial conflicts as nuisances with no winners and therefore to be avoided has resulted in external policies largely accommodating Russia’s interests in the post-Soviet space as military confrontation is not seen as a viable solution. Thus, the EU’s “Russia-first approach” toward the South Caucasus has continued from the 1990s until today and effectively results in little real prospect of moving beyond the current association agreement to full Georgian membership or influence on EU policies.⁵²

In combination with binding a number of European small states have sought to maximize their interests and influence by so-called smart state strategies. Rather than attempting to hide from, seek shelter from or bind the great powers, smart states focus their limited resources where they are likely to get the biggest return in terms of influence on issues on salient issues. They do this tapping into great power discourses by providing (part of) a solution to problems defined by the great powers as important and by taking on the role as mediators or norm-entrepreneurs providing a benchmark for future developments.⁵³ After the Rose Revolution, Georgian policy-makers acted as

norm-entrepreneurs by self-consciously positioning their country as a liberal democratic Western style democracy in the Caucasus, and the successful elections of 2012 and 2013 and the acceptance of defeat by the ruling president further embedded Georgia in Euro-Atlantic liberal democratic discourse,⁵⁴. However, although this has undoubtedly facilitated relations with the EU, other potential effects have been mitigated by the marginal importance of Georgia to Europe and the potential challenges to the EU associated with closer relations. Thus, whereas small states in EU-Europe navigates the dilemma between autonomy and influence in a continuing negotiation process among member states, Georgia is stuck in a situation with limits on its autonomy by the Russian influence over the two breakaway republics, and at the same time accepting a narrowing down of its action space by accommodating to the EU, but without much ability to influence either.

Facing postcolonial instability: Back to the future with a vengeance?

The postcolonial state represents a particularly tricky challenge for the small state. In contrast to the conventional challenges from great powers such as subjugation or invasion, the postcolonial state is typically too weak and too dependent upon external support from international society and/or particular great powers to pose a threat on its own. However, postcolonial instability may pose a threat of spilling over to neighbouring states and/or be used as a vehicle for great powers to expand or solidify their sphere of interest by claiming to legitimately stabilize postcolonial states. In that sense, a small state subject to postcolonial international relations is subject to the worst of two worlds: the unstable complexity of a postmodern globalized world with threats and challenges potentially emerging from many different actors located at different levels and in different parts of the world *and* the traditional great power politics of an anarchic state-based modern international system, but now with great powers more often claiming the right to interference in order to contain threats and challenges emerging from domestic disorders.

As the Georgian case illustrates the problem is intensified if the small state itself shares a postcolonial past that may pose a serious threat to national security. Thus, the conflicts over South Ossetia and Abkhazia reflects the legacy of the Russian and Soviet empires. Abkhazia was annexed to Georgia in 1864, and thereby integrated into Russia as Russia had annexed the western Georgian kingdom of Imereti in 1810 and subsequently added several territories. Ossetians lived in Northern Georgia from the 17th century sharing Christian traditions and the experience of resisting Russification with Georgians but at the same time in a conflictual relationship with Georgia following

the advent of Georgian nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁵⁵ In the Soviet Union South Ossetia was awarded the status of “autonomous district” following attempts to declare independence from Georgia,⁵⁶ whereas Abkhazia was an “autonomous republic”.⁵⁷

At the same time instability in postcolonial states may represent an opportunity to cooperate more closely with a great power and thereby forge or strengthen the basis for a shelter strategy for the small state. Georgia has taken this opportunity in regard to both Russia and the United States since post-Soviet independence. Shortly after coming to power in the 2003 Rose Revolution, President Saakashvili identified “much closer, warmer and friendlier relations with the Russian Federation” as a main priority of his administration.⁵⁸ One way of underpinning this closer relationship was to pursue a policy of crackdowns on Chechen separatists using Georgia as a safe haven, thereby helping the Russian great power with one of its security problems stemming from the now postcolonial Soviet empire. Meanwhile Russia contributed to the appeasement of Ajarian leader Aslan Abashidze by persuading him to resign and leave for Moscow rather than challenge the Georgian leadership and thereby helping Georgia with one of the challenges from its postcolonial legacy by allowing the Georgian leadership to omnibalance.⁵⁹ In regard to the United States, Georgia’s relationship with the United States was strengthened by Georgian participation in the Iraq War (eventually growing to 2,000 troops, the third largest contribution to the Coalition of the Willing), thereby solidifying the US-Georgian relationship. Also, Georgia was one of the largest contributors outside NATO to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan,⁶⁰ and when ISAF ended in 2014 and was followed by the Resolute Support Mission from January 1, 2015, Georgia was the number two contributor after the United States with 885 troops serving by May 2015.⁶¹

Whereas these two examples show the potential for small state-great power cooperation in the face of postcolonial challenges, they also illustrate the potential shallowness of shelter strategies tied to this type of challenges. Georgian crackdown on Chechen insurgents may have helped forge the support of Russia in the face of Ajarian claims to independence, but it did not stop Russia from playing an active role in supporting Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence politically, economically and militarily and thereby de facto foreclosing Georgian membership of NATO and the EU for the foreseeable future. Georgian support for the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan may have served as an important vehicle for closer cooperation between the two countries, but it did not secure US military support when Georgia was invaded by Russia in August 2008 or prevent a US-

Russian ‘reset’ of relations in March 2009, just over six months after the war. And by 2015, Georgia has no short-term, prospect of full NATO membership and no short term prospect of end to the Russian occupation.

With hiding being impossible and shelter strategies proving impotent, Georgia seems to be stuck in two strategic dilemmas.⁶² In regard to Russia, Georgia navigates a dilemma between subjugation and obsolescence. On the one hand, if Georgia chooses to give into Russian pressure and give up parts of its autonomy (and territory), this may create the peace and stability as well as the undisputed borders necessary for membership of Euro-Atlantic institutions. However, this will signal Georgian subjugation and may be steps down a slippery slope of accepting ever more concessions to Russian interests thereby in the end undermining the prospects for Georgian membership of Euro-Atlantic institutions. On the other hand, a steadfast rejection of Russian interests in Georgia and its breakaway republics is likely to make Georgian interests obsolete to the Russian government as they are unlikely to accept Georgian policies challenging the Russian perception of its sphere of interest. Thus, no matter which policy route the Georgian leadership follows, Georgia is likely to be stuck in the dilemma between subjugation and obsolescence with little chance of changing their strategic environment. The Georgian relationship with the United States seems to be of little help in this situation. In contrast, Georgia seems stuck in a related dilemma between goodwill and credibility. On the one hand, as a ‘would-be insider’ in regard to Euro-Atlantic institutions, and NATO in particular, Georgia needs to create goodwill among the Euro-Atlantic great powers, most importantly the United States. Georgia has done so with success and continues to do so by its active contributions to NATO-led operations and cooperation with NATO and EU member states. On the other hand, these continuing contributions in spite of being left virtually alone with Russia during and after the 2008 war risks undermining the credibility of Georgian claims to membership in return for showing that it is truly an actively contributing member of the Euro-Atlantic community. Georgia seems at the same time to be over-fulfilling the (not so explicit) requirements for inclusion in the West,⁶³ and both unable and unwilling to deliver what is necessary for membership of Euro-Atlantic institutions: an end to the conflicts with the two breakaway republics and its territorial disputes with Russia.

From identifying scope conditions to explaining foreign policy: Statehood and balance of threat theory

This paper has argued that the strategic options of small states are dependent upon how much action space they are allowed by other states, in particular the great powers, in their close vicinity and explored how Georgia's strategic opportunities and challenges have varied in the shadow of modern, postmodern and postcolonial states with important consequences for Georgia's strategic choice. At the same time, the analysis suffers from two limitations. First, whereas the statehood prism alerts our attention to a hitherto understudied aspect of small state foreign policy, it tells us very little about the general assumptions of international relations that may inform the application of the prism for understanding foreign policy. Second, and related to this point, while resting on assumptions about power (a focus on how great power statehood affects small state strategic choice) and geopolitics (a focus on the geopolitical vicinity) these assumptions are left untheorized in the discussion above. How might we tackle these limitations?

One candidate solution is to integrate the statehood prism with Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory.⁶⁴ Balance of threat theory offers a sound grounding in realist assumptions about international relations that are compatible with the use of the statehood prism above: states are the primary actors, and they make their strategic choices conditioned on the uncertainty about the capabilities and intentions of other actors created by the anarchic structure of the international system. At the same time balance of threat theory shares with the statehood prism the observation that it is not power itself that is threatening, but how it is used. As noted by Walt: "power of other states can be either a liability or an asset, depending on where it is located, what it can do, and how it is used".⁶⁵ Thus power is merely one element among others in a threat calculation that also includes perception of intent, the offence-defence balance and geographic proximity. Paradoxically, the Achilles Heel of balance of threat theory is its conceptualization of intentions. Walt notes that "[i]ntention, not power, is crucial" but refrains from unpacking or theorizing exactly how.⁶⁶ The statehood prism may offer balance of threat theory this much needed conceptualization by providing a systematic and relatively simple template for analyzing intentions in terms of modern, postmodern and postcolonial views of international relations as explained and applied above.

This integrated *balance of threat plus statehood* approach may allow for a more systematic account of the role of power and geopolitics than the statehood prism and a more systematic integration of intentions in the analysis than balance of threat theory offers in its original formulation. As Georgia developed from a postcolonial state in the early 1990s to a modern state from the mid-1990s and a would-be postmodern state since the Rose Revolution this had decisive

effects on how it perceived the intentions of other states, but how these perceptions of intention are transmitted into policy decisions is dependent upon proximity and power that tell us which actors are decisive for Georgian security and survival, and to which extent they are able to project their power on Georgian territory. At the same time, the modern, postmodern or postcolonial character of these powers tells us which kind of power they are able and willing to project and how likely they are to take action.

Conclusion

Small state foreign policy is formulated within a discursive space defined by great power politics. In turn, the nature and consequences of this space are conditioned upon the statehood of the great powers. Modern, postmodern and postcolonial states all seek to maximize their interests in international relations but they differ in how they define their interests and which means they see as legitimate and effective in pursuing them. Thus, even though Georgia's foreign policy action space remains a function of its geopolitical location, we need to understand the statehood of Georgia as well as the states with interests in its geopolitical vicinity if we are to understand the nature of this action space and the challenges and opportunities of Georgian foreign policy,

The ability of small states to manipulate or restrain the policies of the strong within this discursive space vary widely. As a 'would-be insider' to Euro-Atlantic institutions, Georgia had much less influence on European affairs than the insiders at the same time as it had to adapt its policies to signal its willingness and ability become an insider. To paraphrase George Orwell 'all small states are equal but some small states are more equal than others'. Modern power politics continue to trump postmodern as well as postcolonial opportunities and challenges. Recent literature on small state strategy has emphasized 'smart' ways to maximize influence drawing on the experience of small EU member states. However, as illustrated by the Georgian case, postmodern rules of the game only apply within the confines of the postmodern political space. Georgia was first punished by Russia for being a US spearhead in the Caucasus and then ignored by a wounded post-Iraq War United States in its effort to reset relations with a resurgent Russia after the war. Even the postmodern European Union played the modern great power game largely adapting to the policies of Russia and leaving Georgia to its own devices, whenever there was a risk of open confrontation with Russia. For these reasons, Georgia's future as a Euro-Atlantic country looks more bleak than one would believe when

listening to Georgian or Western decision-makers. Georgia is stuck between postmodern Europe, modern Russia and the postcolonial post-Soviet space, and there is little the country can do about it, although future policy choices may ameliorate the situation. No matter whether Georgia attempted to pursue shelter, binding or smart strategies by providing a democratic benchmark in the Caucasus, this failed to provide the expected entry ticket into Euro-Atlantic institutions as neither the EU nor the United States were willing to confront Russia over the issue.

Notes

¹ Hey, "Introducing small state", 1.

² Neumann and Gstöhl, "Introduction: Lilliputians", 5.

³ Knudsen, "Analysing Small-State Security", xv.

⁴ See Mouritzen, *Theory and Reality*.

⁵ See Fox, *The Power of Small States*.

⁶ Browning, "Small, Smart and Salient?", 669.

⁷ Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma", 172-173.

⁸ Aron, *Peace and War*, 83.

⁹ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

¹⁰ Elman, "the Foreign Policies".

¹¹ Hey, "Introducing small state", 6.

¹² Mouritzen, *Theory and Reality*; Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*.

¹³ Thorhallsson, "The Size of States", 8.

¹⁴ Björkdahl, "Norm advocacy"; Ingebritsen, "Norm Entrepreneurs".

¹⁵ Bailes, Rickli and Thorhallsson, "Small States, Survival and Strategy"; Larsen, *Analysing the Foreign Policy*.

¹⁶ This limitation is only exacerbated by the frequent focus on influencing institutional settings such as the UN or the EU, which tend to provide a rather different diplomatic infrastructure than bilateral and non-institutionalized settings. Archer, Bailes and Wivel, *Small states and International Security*; Cooper and Shaw 2009, *The Diplomacy of Small States*; Vital, *The Inequality of States*.

¹⁷ Sørensen, *Changes in Statehood*.

¹⁸ Ibid., 73.

¹⁹ See also Cooper, *The Post-modern State*.

²⁰ Al-Rodhan and Stoudmann, "Definitions of Globalization", 5. Cf. Katzenstein, "States and Power", 149.

²¹ Cerny, "Paradoxes of the Competition State", 253.

²² Sørensen, *Changes in Statehood*, 104-105.

²³ Gahrton, *Georgia: Pawn*, 1.

²⁴ On The United States and Georgia, see .e.g Mitchell, *Uncertain Democracy*. On Russia and Georgia, see e.g. Allison, "Russia Resurgent". On the EU and Georgia, see e.g. Popescu, *EU Foreign Policy and Post-Soviet Conflicts*, and Hnederson and Weaver, *The Black Sea Region and EU Policy*. Se also, Coppieters and Legvold, *Statehood and Security*.

²⁵ See e.g. <http://www.interpressnews.ge/en/politicss/22317-le-figaro-georgia-is-post-modern-face-of-caucasus.html?ar=A> (accessed December 22, 2015).

²⁶ (Cheterian, "The August 2008 War", 157.

²⁷ Nation, *Russia, the United States*, 23.

²⁸ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian*, 324-328.

²⁹ In that sense Georgia in the first years after independence resembled many Third World states 'omnibalancing' internal and external threats to regime survival. Onmnibalancing, see David, "Explaining Third World Alignment".

³⁰ Nilsson, "Georgia's Rose Revolution", 85.

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- ³¹ Zürcher 2007, *The Post-Soviet Wars*, 126.
- ³² Fox, *The Power of Small States*; Vital, *The Inequality of States*.
- ³³ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*. Cf. Bailes, Rickli and Thorhallsson, "Small States, Survival and Strategy".
- ³⁴ Mouritzen and Wivel, *Explaining Foreign Policy*.
- ³⁵ Demytrie, "Unrest tilts Georgia".
- ³⁶ Nilsson, *Beacon of Liberty*, 155.
- ³⁷ Jones, "Statement of General", 29.
- ³⁸ One explanation for this may be that the Georgian strategy had less to do with seeking shelter and more to do with the ideas of the Georgian elite about the identity and purpose of the state, see Gvalia et al. "Thinking Outside the Bloc". On ideational influence on Georgian foreign policy, see also Kakachia and Minesashvili, "Identity Politics", and German, "Heading West".
- ³⁹ Thornton and Turmanidze, "Public Attitudes in Georgia" (2016). Cf. Cecire, "The Kremlin Pulls".
- ⁴⁰ Thornton and Sichinava, "Public Attitudes in Georgia" (2015).
- ⁴¹ Cecire, "The Kremlin Pulls".
- ⁴² See Hudson, "Between Russia and U.S.". |
- ⁴³ Cooper et al., "Bound to follow", 397-398.
- ⁴⁴ Cecire, "The Kremlin Pulls".
- ⁴⁵ Merry, "The Origins of Russia's War in Ukraine", 40.
- ⁴⁶ Popescu, *EU Foreign Policy*, 93.
- ⁴⁷ Dinesen and Wivel, "Georgia and Moldova", 155.
- ⁴⁸ Cooper et al., "Bound to follow", 397-398.
- ⁴⁹ See e.g. Wallace, "Small European States".
- ⁵⁰ Mäes and Verdun, "Small States"; Jakobsen, "Small States, Big Influence".
- ⁵¹ Wolczuk 2010, "Convergence without Finalité", 46. Also, in 2005, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had attempted to increase the EU's attentions to the Georgian conflicts by founding the 'New Group of Georgia's Friends', see Popescu, *EU Foreign Policy*, 76-77.
- ⁵² On the EU's Russia-first approach, see Popescu, *EU Foreign Policy*, 69.
- ⁵³ Arter, "Smart State Influence"; Björkdahl, "Norm Advocacy"; Grøn and Wivel, "Maximizing Influence".
- ⁵⁴ As noted by *The Economist*, the acceptance of defeat was 'pretty remarkable stuff' for a post-Soviet country outside the Baltic region <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2012/10/georgian-politics> (accessed December 11, 2015).
- ⁵⁵ Rich, "Introduction", xiiv.
- ⁵⁶ See Nichol, *Russia-Georgia Conflict*, 1.
- ⁵⁷ Goltz, "The Paradox of Living", 13.
- ⁵⁸ Lambroschini, "Georgia: Moscow Watches Warily".
- ⁵⁹ On the Ajarian case, see Nilsson, "Georgia's Rose Revolution", 91. On Georgian omnibalancing see the discussion on the first years after post-Cold War independence above.
- ⁶⁰ NATO, *NATO-Georgia Relations*.
- ⁶¹ NATO, *Resolute Support Mission*.
- ⁶² For a discussion of the logic of these dilemmas more generally, see Mouritzen and Wivel, "Constellation Theory", 33-36.
- ⁶³ Cf. Nilsson, *Beacon of Liberty*.
- ⁶⁴ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*.
- ⁶⁵ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, viii.
- ⁶⁶ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 26.

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